

DATE ISSUED: June 12, 2002 REPORT NO. P-02-104

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board  
Agenda of June 27, 2002

SUBJECT: **ITEM # 12 - BURLINGAME VOLUNTARY/TRADITIONAL  
HISTORICAL DISTRICT**

APPLICANT: Burlingame Property Owners volunteering properties for historical  
designation

LOCATION: Burlingame neighborhood, North Park Community Planning Area,  
Council District 3

DESCRIPTION: Should the Historical Resources Board (HRB) initiate the designation  
process for the establishment of the Burlingame Voluntary/Traditional  
Historical District?

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Find that the information submitted is complete and  
adequate, and initiate the designation process for the establishment of the Burlingame  
Voluntary/Traditional Historical District by scheduling the designation hearing for July  
25, 2002, the next available Board meeting.**

## BACKGROUND:

This item is brought before the Historical Resources Board (HRB) in conformance with the Board's "Historical District Policy on Establishing Historical Districts" through the submittal of properties volunteered for designation by more than 51% of the owners of these sites. See Attachments 1, 2, 3.

The Historical Resources Board Policy on "Establishing Historical Districts" was originally approved in January 1977. Since that time, the Policy has been amended twice, in August 2000, and in April 2002 (Attachment 2). The original 1977 Policy established the process for the Board's consideration and designation of historical districts. These districts were established by the City's Progress Guide and General Plan Cultural Preservation Element, and later by the Historic Preservation Plan, both adopted by the City Council, are now defined as geographic based traditional types of districts. Since that time, the City has also established Thematic Districts (Chinese/Asian Thematic District of 1987) following National Park Service Guidelines. In 1999, in response to a request received from the Ocean Beach Historical Society to allow the establishment of a volunteer driven historical district where only the owner volunteered sites would be designated, HRB amended the Historical District Policy to include both the Thematic Historical District and the Emerging District in the City's 'toolbox' for historical districts. This amendment to the HRB Policy took place on August 28, 2000.

Burlingame neighborhood leaders have been interested in historical district designation for at least two decades. In the early 1980's neighborhood historians collected historical information on the neighborhood's early years. This was followed in 1988 by a Planning Department Recognizance Survey of the Greater Mid-City area. The effort was followed in 1996 by one undertaken by Ione Stiegler with Wayne Donaldson Architect who prepared the Greater Mid-City Historical Preservation Strategy Study. This study identified Burlingame as a potential (traditional) historical district based on its association with: the early, pre-World War I San Diego suburban development that followed rail corridors; the McFadden & Buxton "Systems Firm" which utilized experts in the various fields of development; the involvement of a Master Architect (William H. Wheeler) in the development of the tract and the design of individual homes; and the area's settlement by significant San Diego personalities.

In 1999, neighborhood leaders contacted HRB staff requesting that the historical district program be pursued. The Planning Department initiated the necessary community dialogue and document update for this effort. Initially the program for the Burlingame Historical District was to pursue a traditional geographic based historical district which would have included: a Statement of Significance, individual site descriptions for all sites, Design/Development Guidelines, and a Revitalization Action Program. Staff and neighborhood representatives worked for 1.5 years on this program and attended at least four neighborhood meetings designed to discuss and develop the various elements of the program. At a neighborhood meeting held in July 2001, and subsequent to that meeting, limited but strong opposition emerged against the establishment of the Geographic/Traditional Historical District. At that time, some neighborhood representatives voiced a preference for the application of the Emerging Historical District program instead.

The recently established (August 2000) Emerging District Program did not fit the particular situation in Burlingame because Burlingame already had the benefit of a comprehensive historical study. Also, staff recognized that there were similar situations in other communities throughout the City, where a community may not be ready to support a Geographic/Traditional Historical District. Based on this situation, HRB staff proceeded to develop a new type of “volunteer driven” historical district, the Voluntary/Traditional Historical District. The City’s Historical Resources Board amended the Historical District Policy on April 25, 2002. The information now before the Board brings forward the establishment of Burlingame as a Voluntary/Traditional Historical District.

### ANALYSIS:

The analysis that follows is divided into four parts: 1) the requirements of a Voluntary/Traditional Historical District; 2) the documentation included as part of the Voluntary/Traditional Historical District program; 3) the significance of Burlingame as a historical district; and, 4) issues raised regarding the establishment of Burlingame as a Voluntary/Traditional Historical District.

#### **1. The requirements of a Voluntary/Traditional Historical District**

By HRB Policy (Attachment 2) the Voluntary/Traditional Historical District requires: the establishment of geographic boundaries; a statement of significance based on Board criteria; site surveys for every property on State of California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR-523) Forms; and, identification of potentially contributing sites and non-contributing sites. Board consideration of historical districts requires that there be a designation request, that a historical report be available, a listing for volunteered sites be available, notices be given to affected property owners, that board members make a site visit, and that two consecutive hearings be held. The First hearing is scheduled for the Board to establish that all information is complete and adequate. If information is so deemed, a second hearing is scheduled for the next regular Board meeting, to consider designation and establish the historical district.

By Board Policy, the Voluntary/Traditional Historical District may be established only upon the voluntary submittal for historical site designation by the owners of 51% or more of potentially contributing sites (individually significant or contributors).

The Voluntary/Traditional Historical District is conceptualized as one that could eventually grow into the more traditional type of district. On this basis the policy establishes that *“When more than 85% of the Potentially Contributing Sites have been designated, the Board shall proceed to establish a Geographic/Traditional based Historical District”*. The 85% threshold number reflects the equivalent number to a 60% or better community-wide support for the formation of the Geographic/Traditional Historical District. Upon reaching the 85% threshold, the community would come forward with a request to formulate the Geographic/Traditional Historical District. This request if followed up, would require an update to the historical study, development of design/development guidelines, community meetings, and two new hearings with the HRB. The hearing requirements for the initiation, and the designation and establishment of this Geographic/Traditional Historical District would have to be scheduled.

## **2. The documentation included as part of the Voluntary/Traditional Historical District Program.**

Documentation included in the Burlingame Voluntary/Traditional District Draft Report includes: geographic boundaries; a statement of significance based on Board criteria related to common heritage, traditional activity, rare past, development progression, consistent plan, craftsmanship, building groupings, and landmark supportive; site surveys for every property on DPR-523 Forms identifying potentially contributing sites (already designated, individually significant, contributors) and non-contributing sites. In total, the Burlingame neighborhood contains one hundred eighty nine (189) properties of which one hundred seventy one (171) sites are potentially contributing sites. Of these, thirty-six (36) sites are individually significant. Seventeen (17) sites are non-contributing.

Burlingame is unique in that, due to its prominence and association with significant architects and historical persons, it has numerous sites (36) that meet the individually significant threshold for designation. Significance for these sites comes from being excellent examples of historic architectural styles, association with master architects or craftsmen, and/or significant historical persons. Ten of those sites are already designated and listed in the City's Register of Historical Landmarks.

Based on the HRB Policy for Voluntary/Traditional Historical Districts, at least 51% of the potentially contributing sites or eighty seven (87) sites (of 171 total) have to be volunteered for designation by the owners. As of June 10, 2002, there were in excess of 51% of the owners who volunteered their sites for historic designation. To date one hundred thirteen (113) applications for site designation have been volunteered by their respective property owners. The list is included as Attachment 3. An updated count of volunteered sites will be available to the Board at the June 27, 2002 meeting.

Staff finds that the information included in the Burlingame Voluntary/Traditional Historical District draft document required for the establishment of the District is adequate and complete. Therefore staff recommends that the Board make any comments it deems appropriate, and set the July 25, 2002, meeting for the designation and establishment of the historical district.

## **3. The significance of Burlingame as a Historical District.**

Burlingame is significant as an example of early 20<sup>th</sup> century American suburban development that followed the rail corridors. Development begun in the pre-World War I years and continued through World War II, until the early postwar in 1952. Initially developed in 1912, Burlingame was situated along the 30<sup>th</sup> Street rail corridor from downtown San Diego to East San Diego. Unlike its surrounding rigid "grid pattern" neighborhoods, Burlingame's street pattern is curvilinear, following the contours of the land. The "Systems Firm" of McFadden & Buxton was responsible for Burlingame's development with the support of experts in the various fields of development including engineering, architectural design, construction and marketing. This is the beginning of the American development firm par excellence in San Diego. Through the System Firm's excellence of design provided by Master Architect William H. Wheeler and the Firm's marketing program, Burlingame attracted the investment and residency of important San Diegans. Some of whom in turn, brought their own master architects and craftsmen to build their homes. As a result, Burlingame has a number of excellent examples of vintage American home

architecture, designed by Master Architects. These houses have withstood the test of time, maintaining their high quality design through the years. A few homes are surprisingly “modern” for their time. These Art Deco, Prairie, and International Style homes, many of them built in 1912, are very early examples of their genre in San Diego.

Through its development from 1912 until 1952, Burlingame became the showcase of architectural home styles of the day, with significant numbers of Craftsman, Spanish Colonial Revival, Mission Revival, Prairie, and a few California Ranch homes in the later years of development. Based on the information provided in the historical district documentation (See Attachment 5), staff believes that Burlingame is significant under HRB CRITERIA A (Community Resource), B (Event, Personage), C (Architecture), D (Master Builder), and F (Contributing Structures to a District). A detailed description of the criteria met will be provided at the next HRB hearing for the designation and establishment of the Voluntary/Traditional Historical District.

#### **4. Issues raised regarding the establishment of the Burlingame Voluntary/Traditional Historical District Program.**

As part of this program, HRB staff has had extensive communications with neighborhood representatives regarding program questions. On June 6, 2002, staff sponsored a public discussion to describe the Burlingame Voluntary/Traditional Historical District, explain processes and address all issues raised during the meeting. Earlier, staff responded to a questionnaire by the Burlingame Community Association (See Attachment 4), which dealt with a wide range of issues, many of them related to the difference in documentation between a “non-voluntary” Geographic/Traditional Historical District, and the proposed Voluntary/Traditional Historical District. In addition two important questions continue to be raised, which deserve some discussion in this report. These include the 85% provision for conversion from a “voluntary” to a “non-voluntary” historical district, and an issue related to home insurance availability.

##### The 85% Provision

Concern has been consistently expressed by some community members about the requirement of participation in a historical district. Following an initial process to establish a Geographical/Traditional Historical District, staff developed, and the HRB adopted, a policy for a Voluntary/Traditional Historical District where designated sites are volunteered into the district. While this approach was generally supported by the community, the provision in the Board policy about “proceeding to establish a Geographic/Traditional based Historical District” has caused concern to a limited group of owners in the neighborhood who have raised objections.

Through this process, staff has had to balance desires of a substantial portion of Burlingame property owners for preservation with consistently expressed concerns from some over required participation.

During discussions at public meetings and with individuals, staff has referred to the Board’s Historical District Policy and has explained that the conversion process would be the same as that required for the establishment of all other historical districts, including: an updated document, design/development guidelines tailored to the area and developed with the benefit of community input and consensus; expression of community support by generally a 60% or more

number of the property owners in the area, and the two required and noticed HRB public hearings.

This is the first Voluntary/Traditional Historical District that would be established. It is unknown whether, once 85% of the potential contributing sites within the district boundaries have volunteered to be designated as part of the district whether the neighborhood's property owners would feel comfortable with that level of designation or whether they would wish to pursue the traditional district. The outcome of such discussions cannot be predetermined since there will be a public process to establish support, and HRB hearings to accept testimony in favor of, or against, proceeding to establish the traditional district.

#### Home Insurance

Home insurance problems associated with historical designation have also been raised as an issue by virtue of the fact that when a site has to be reconstructed after a loss, insurance is not available.

With regards to reconstruction requirements after a loss, there is no requirement to reconstruct a historical site unless the loss was the result of a purposeful act by the owner and designed to destroy the historical resource. The National Park Service has no such requirements, nor does the State of California, or the City of San Diego. At the local level, the City does not have reconstruction requirements for either an "act of god" or an accidental loss. In the past, the City has not required reconstruction in a number of instances where a historical site has been lost to fire. But the City will enforce codes if it is proven that a willful action of destruction has been taken by an owner in violation of the codes.

With regards to the issue of insurance availability for historical properties, staff has reviewed the scenario with the State Office of Historic Preservation, local Real Estate Brokers specializing in historic preservation, and various insurance companies. Neighborhood representatives have also done their own research with their home insurance companies, and the conclusion is that insurance issues are not limited to historical designation. There is no evidence that insurance companies will not insure historical sites. The City has in excess of 1000 historical sites, and this is the first instance that an issue of insurance has been raised. However; at present there are some home insurance problems surfacing affecting home sites regardless of their historical status. For example, State Farm Insurance has (for sometime) been reluctant to insure residences, and as of May 1, 2002, has suspended all new policies in California. This suspension affects all new potential customers only, and applies to all residential properties, whether they are old, new, or designated historical sites. The suspension is based on mounting losses due to mold and water damage, primarily in Northern California.

By contrast, companies such as Allstate, Amica, Corey Western Insurance and others still write policies on older homes, and historic designation is not an issue, but location and relationship to open space and canyons (fire risk) is an issue. Another area of insurance company interest is "neighborhood pride of ownership" context. For home replacements, and specially for any design feature where craftsmanship is key, policy upgrades are available and an owner's option. Staff discussions with Real Estate Brokers with expertise on historic homes, has identified the situation where historic homeowners may choose to consider insurance upgrades to reconstruct craftsman features not otherwise covered by the standard policy. The upgrade is available to anyone regardless of historical status of the property, and policies do not require notification if a

property is designated, unless the owner wishes to expand the coverage by including craftsman features not previously covered. Most policies however, require notice if there is a change in use of the property. This condition would apply if a historic property were to obtain a Conditional Use Permit and change from residential use to office, bed and breakfast use, or other use.

Finally, staff has also discussed the issue with the State Office of Historic Preservation who have identified a special insurance program available through the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The National Trust offers insurance for historical sites through the Chubb group of companies, and MIMS International. Policies cover “extended replacement cost coverage” which will pay to have the home rebuilt, even if the cost is greater than the amount of coverage. The program is available nationally. However, the “extended replacement cost coverage” although available, is capped at 150% in California and a few other states.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, based on the historical information submitted staff believes that the information is complete and accurate, and there are enough volunteered sites in excess of 51% of the potentially contributing sites (already designated, individually significant, and potential contributors) that warrant Board consideration of the proposed Burlingame Voluntary/Traditional Historical District. If the Board has any specific comments, staff would take note so they may be incorporated into the final document and are discussed in the staff report for the next hearing. On this basis staff recommends that the Board find the information is complete and adequate and schedule the designation hearing for July 25, 2002.

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AL/bh

Attachments: 1. Burlingame Voluntary/Traditional Historical District map  
2. HRB Historical District Policy on Establishment of Historical Districts  
3. Burlingame Voluntary/Traditional Historical district volunteered sites for designation list as of June 10, 2002  
4. Burlingame Community Association Questions and HRB staff responses  
5. Burlingame Voluntary/Traditional Historical District Report Draft by separate cover